Moderation of Enterprise Social Networks – A Literature Review from a Corporate Perspective

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Abstract

The implementation of internal social collaboration technologies confronts corporations with new challenges. Former unidirectional information flows become multidirectional and user-content driven networks. Prior research describes the successful implementation as a challenging management task with employees’ usage at the center of attention. Consequently, corporations need to select a moderation style to encourage the usage. The degree of corporate engagement might have repercussions on the contribution behavior. We conduct a structured literature review to identify pre-existing IS contributions to the moderation phenomenon in social media tools, which help to explain on how to moderate these communication platforms in the enterprise context. We reviewed over 150 articles on the subject and assessed 31 articles in depth on the degree of corporate engagement and user content encouragement. We analyze the identified literature for gaps in understanding the phenomenon and provide a first assessment of three different moderation approaches and give implication for future research.

1. Introduction

Enterprise social networks (ESN) is still a young field within the information systems (IS) research. The dynamic nature of this research field calls for a shifting focus to address the plethora issues, both from the perspective of research as well as from practice. Organizations nowadays are heavily investing into ESN services to facilitate a better exchange, wider reach and easier access to organizational information [3,39,45]. As a consequence of such high organizational attention, this young and evolving IS research field is recognized as an important part of the whole social media research stream [35]. Those web based social media technologies – micro-/blogs, social networking sites, wikis, communities to name a few [17,36,67] – are common in user features of profiles, relational connections and sharing/exploring [8]. ESN services can be separated in intra-organizational platforms restricted to an employee’s audience or in the use of social media platforms for external party interaction [59]. The first named intra-organizational context challenges enterprise settings fundamentally. Via ESN services intra-organizational knowledge and information flows become visible throughout the whole corporation to enable employee driven communication, collaboration, innovation and knowledge sharing [22,43]. The visibility of information and relation ties is achieved with the open display of user generated content (UGC) within the ESN [45]. Here the UGC plays a vital role for organizations, as the open content display can be beneficial for enterprises to bridge structural holes in terms of employee innovation [22] or diminishes the unwanted information brokerage of specific individuals’ in the organization [60]. Further, the visibility lets employees explore UGC actively by editing and distributing or passively through consuming content [41,67]. This transparent bottom up or crowd approach might interfere or even contrast with current organizational structures and work practices [37].

The current body of knowledge (BoK) in regard to the intra-organizational deployment of ESN is driven by the discussion of the support or substitution of internal communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing practices [31,45,67]. Here the effect on employee performance of ESN use [1,28,41] and factors influencing employees motivation to engage or reject such platforms [10,12,13,42,52,62,69] are growing fields. Since, these new collaborations tools are impacting the organizational relation und information association, they also interfere with hierarchy and power structures [6,67]. This very interesting research topic has not been getting the main interest, although, it was being mentioned and acknowledged by the ESN researchers. As prior research was mainly focused on the user perspective, we try to pick up this discussion from a corporate perspective with the following question: